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How internationalised is your university? How can you know and what can you do?

Helen Spencer-Oatey and Daniel Dauber

In January 2016, Times Higher Education (THE) published its latest rankings of the world's "most international universities". The results are based on their "international outlook indicator", which takes into account each institution's proportion of international staff, proportion of international students and proportion of research papers published with at least one co-author from another country. A number of comments have been posted on the [THE website](#), many of which are critical of the methodology used to calculate the rankings. Some point to the impact of size of country and others question whether academics from neighbouring countries/regions (e.g. Germans in Austria; Mainland Chinese in Hong Kong) really make the university more international. Yet others question whether the findings necessarily correlate with 'bestness', yet Phil Baty, the editor of the THE World University Rankings, maintains that while they are not a proxy for excellence, they help people gain a deeper understanding of the global higher education landscape.

Debates such as this raise some fundamental questions: What are the goals of internationalisation? How can we best measure levels of internationalisation? How can we apply any insights we obtain? We explore these issues in this article, taking students and their growth and development as our particular focus.

What are the goals of internationalisation?

University leaders and staff may have a range of goals for internationalisation, both organisational and structural, and two of the most common relate to international student recruitment and level of student mobility. For example, the University of Edinburgh states in their [internationalisation strategy](#) that they wish to recruit a further 1000 non-EU international students within three years, and the [University of Nottingham](#) identifies an increase in the percentage of students on some form of outward mobility as one of its success measures.

Clearly, these are important initiatives, yet as a recent [British Council](#) reports point out, they are inadequate in themselves:

"simply having a diverse student body does not mean the education or even the campus is global in nature. What comes as an essential part of a global education is the inclusion of international students in communities and classes. Integration of all students is an elemental factor in the expanding concept of internationalisation."

This suggests that diversity is not an end in itself, but rather is merely the foundation for promoting 'integrated communities' and offering a 'global education'. Having a diverse population is an important pre-requisite for reaping these benefits, but it does not in itself ensure that they will be achieved. In other words, the mere existence of a diversified student body does not necessarily lead to interaction nor to the development of 'global skills'. Rather, it is a vital first step in an internationalisation trajectory, as shown in Figure 1.

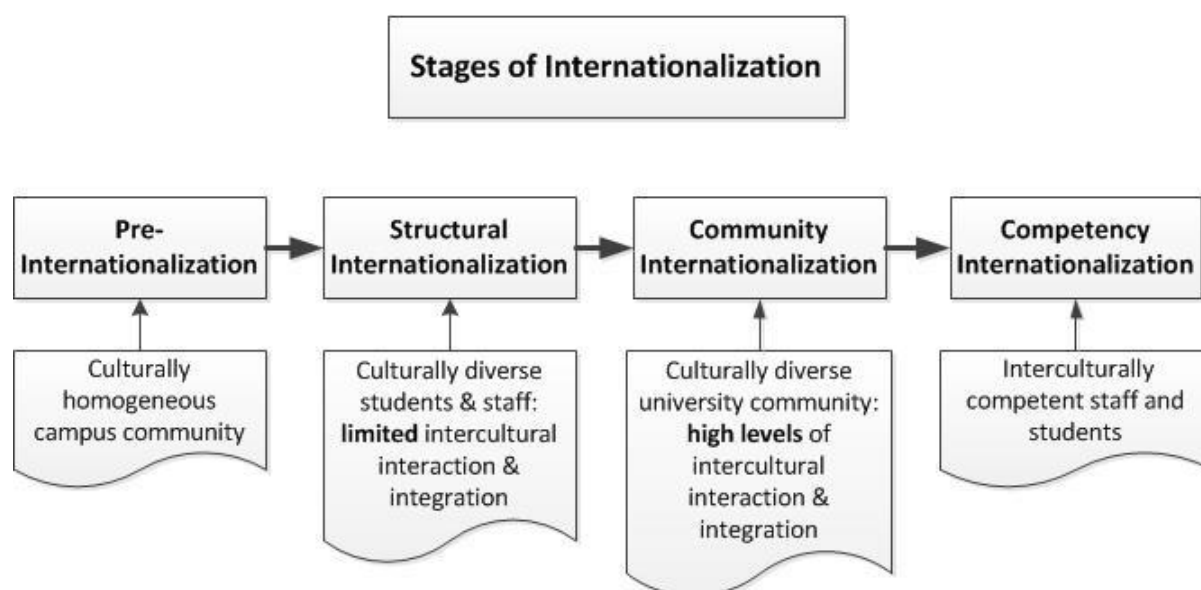


Fig. 1: Developmental Stages of Internationalisation

This means that students not only need to have the opportunity to meet and interact with people from different language and cultural backgrounds (through experiencing a culturally diverse university community and/or through study abroad), but they also need to take advantage of that opportunity. Sadly, it is perfectly possible (and it seems, often quite common) for both home and international students to remain in their comfort zones and experience little intermixing. When that happens, they miss out on the opportunity to learn many new things from each other, including the ‘global graduate’ skills that employers are looking for.

How can we best measure internationalisation?

As Table 1 illustrates, the most well-known organisations that measure internationalisation (Times Higher Education (THE) rankings, QS World rankings, and U-Multirank) all use parameters that are exclusively structural in nature.

Parameters	Organisation		
	THE	QS	U-Multirank
Composition: international students	✓	✓	
Composition: international staff	✓	✓	✓
Composition: international diversity		✓	
Incoming & outgoing student mobility		✓	✓
International student support (religious facilities)		✓	
International joint publications	✓	✓	✓

Table 1: Parameters for ranking internationalisation

Similarly, a recent European funded project, IMPI ([Indicators for Mapping and Profiling Internationalisation, 2009–2012](#)), has drawn up a detailed set of indicators that institutions can use to assess their level of internationalisation, including those that help prepare students for life and work in an intercultural and globalising world. Yet, once again, all the items are structural in nature and, most likely, would produce ‘more of the same’ findings as current benchmarks do. They are unlikely to be able to capture the ‘community’ and ‘competency’ aspects of internationalisation.

In order to transition from a policy of ‘diversity’ to a policy of ‘integrated diversity’ and ‘global graduate’ development, it is necessary for universities to monitor systematically their current progress towards this ‘deeper’ internationalisation. This entails measuring students’ social and academic integration, as well as the extent to which they feel they are developing ‘global skills’, including growth in their understanding of what this means. An increasing number of universities are recognising the importance of these features of internationalisation and yet they are not currently captured in existing measures. So here at the University of Warwick, we have recently designed a tool, the [Global Education Profiler \(GE-P\)](#), specifically to assess these elements in a systematic and reliable manner. It consists of five short modules each of which serves to measure students’ levels of aspiration and actual experiences of ‘integrated diversity’ and ‘global graduate’ development. By probing both aspiration and actual experience, it offers evaluation measures of both ‘supply’ and ‘demand’, as well as any gap that may exist between the two, thus providing more detail than straightforward student satisfaction measures (see Fig.2).

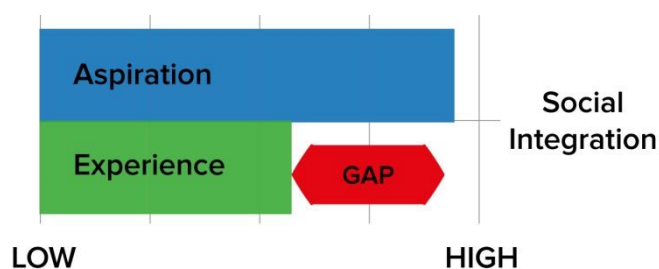


Fig.2: Students’ perceptions of social integration (sample data)

The ‘supply’ and ‘demand’ design reveals an institution’s relative strengths and weaknesses, enabling them to prioritise effort and optimise their internationalisation endeavours. The tool allows for contextualised decisions that are meaningful to policy makers, not only in terms of overall student satisfaction, but also with respect to resource allocation and overall improvement in the social viability of their institution. So this brings us to the next question, how can we apply the insights we gain from such measures?

How can we best promote community and competency internationalisation?

Numerous universities have developed a range of initiatives to help promote integration on campus – for some helpful case study examples from a range of UK universities, see [Promoting Integration on Campus](#). Of course what works well will vary from context to context. Here at the University of Warwick we aim not only to encourage interaction and friendships among people from diverse cultural backgrounds, but also to pro-actively develop students’ ‘global graduate’ skills and the ability to verbalise what this means in a way that is meaningful to employers. For example, we have developed a [3-stage intercultural training programme](#) to address these needs. In Stage 1 (pre-departure for study abroad students; recent arrival for home students), students participate in a workshop, followed by an online course. Here they engage in a range of interactive activities to help them become more interculturally sensitive, especially in relation to communication patterns, underlying assumptions, and their impact on relationship building.

Then in Stage 2, we focus on developing students' observation, reflection and perspective-taking skills. Our aim is to encourage them to pay close attention to their experiences of difference and to reflect on them as deeply as possible. All students, whether abroad or at home, will experience differences of some kind, and we regard all of them as useful for developing intercultural sensitivity. We use our [3R tool](#) to help them with this. Then in the final stage of our programme (Stage 3), which takes place after the students have returned from abroad (or, for home students, after a few months of study), students are given the opportunity to talk with each other and with a mentor about their various intercultural experiences, and through this to draw out their learning. A key aim is to help them acquire the concepts and vocabulary through which they can explain what they have learned and the skills they have developed in ways that are meaningful to others, especially employers.

Students' feedback has been very positive, referring to the programme as "extremely rewarding" and of "direct relevance to gaining a job." Nevertheless, we would like to monitor its effectiveness more systematically, including using tools that can measure students' learning gain in the intercultural field – a challenge that we are currently working on.